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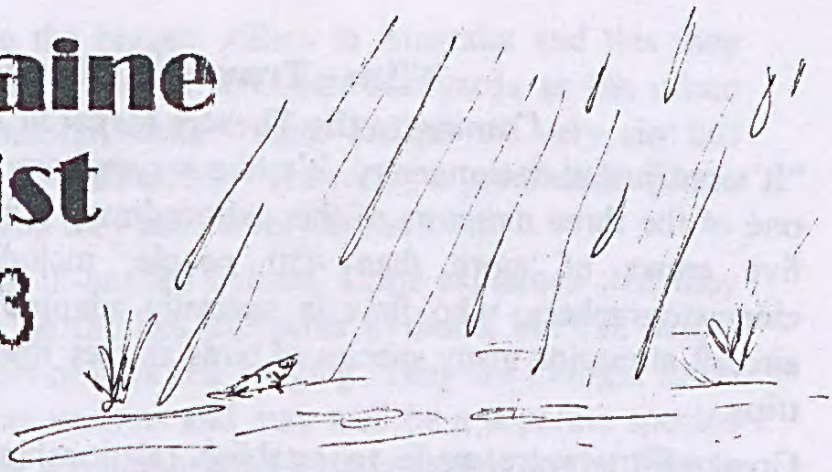

Glacial Erratics and Pavements

Eppalock Excursion

Although the day of the excursion didn't look very promising weatherwise once the walk started it was fine and sunny. Although we didn't see too much of water in the lake (it was only at 7 ½ % capacity at that stage) it gave us a great opportunity to find red granite erratics from as close as the Cobaw Ranges, 30 kms away, to rocks, including conglomerates, which are believed to have originated in western Tasmania.

Our guide for the afternoon was Eric Wilkinson of Bendigo, whom we met in the pouring rain at the Spillway car park. Eric, a geologist, was able to show us the extent of the glacial remains on a couple of maps he had brought along, and then he took us on a walk over the edge of the lake bed where tillite, the grey/blue rock flour which oxidises to red soil with stones dropped out of the glacier embedded randomly in it, forms the bank of the lake in that area.

He took us across to Kellam's Rock, a glacial pavement, discovered and named by Frank Robbins who took us there on the last excursion in 1982 when there was another drought. There was far more water still in the lake that time. The thing that was most noticeable to me on this occasion was the way that the pavement has eroded from the wave wash since 1982. Some of the striations that were so noticeable on the earlier excursion had almost disappeared, but some which have been exposed since then were still clear.

The party finished the excursion at the Derinal Pool (well, it's supposed to be!) area. I did not go on with the others to climb down to the next point of interest, but sat in the car and revelled in the sight of the long evening shadows creeping across the dry lake bed. By the time they returned it was getting too late to visit the Stranger, a large granite erratic, at Derrinal..

Despite the weather and only a few members on the excursion, it was most interesting and enjoyable, despite the depressingly low water line - wherever that was!

Rita Mills

Film – Travelling Birds

Coming to the Theatre Royal in August!

"It's not just a documentary, it's like a symphony," says Jacques Cluzaud, one of the three directors of this extraordinary film. This film was shot by five crews of more than 450 people, including 17 pilots and 14 cinematographers, who flew in specially adapted four wheeled ultralight aircraft alongside many species of birds as they made their annual migratory trips.

Great efforts were made to establish relationships with the birds. They started to talk to the birds when they were still in their eggs and when the eggs hatched and the chicks emerged, people spent time with them talking and walking. For instance the pelican eggs came from Senegal and were taken to Normandy where they were hatched. When they were strong enough to travel, they went back to Senegal with the film crew to film their journey. All the birds were known by name. As a result of such dedicated preparation the birds in this film appear astoundingly at ease often flying within touching distance of the crew and their ultralight machines.

The film speaks volumes about the way birds live in nature and, often in spite of nature. Juxtaposed with some of the great man-made and natural monuments and some of the powerful natural phenomena of the world, this film promises to mesmerise.

Geraldine Harris

Snakes in the Hand

At our July meeting we were privileged to hear Chris Hay talk about his fieldwork in outback locations searching for snakes and other reptiles. Chris usually works as a cabinet maker but his great passion is the study of snakes and reptiles and so whenever research calls and funds are available he heads out into the outback to see what he can find.

Chris brought along two live hand raised snakes, a Red-bellied Black Snake and Black-headed Python to show how tame snakes can become if handled correctly from an early age. As he talked they were content to explore the immediate environs from their safe position coiled around him. Red-bellied Black snakes are the least toxic of our snakes and are often found along waterways. They are reluctant to bite and will usually try to move away if disturbed.

Snakes have no external ear opening and are totally deaf to air born sound but they do detect vibrations through the ground. They are more active in Spring than in Summer because their body temperature is dependant on the outside temperature and summer temperatures can be too hot for them. In summer they are more active in the early morning and late evening. All snakes are opportunistic when it comes to feeding and will eat other snakes.

Common Brown Snakes are traditionally found in dry country and will

defend themselves. They are the biggest killers in Australia and this may well be because they are often found in suburban backyards as the urban sprawl encroaches on their natural habitat. Tiger Snakes are very shy but more aggressive and will defend themselves. They vary a great deal. Some are banded and some are not and they have a very broad head.

While holding his beautiful Black-headed Python, Chris explained that they do not have heat-sensing pits on the lips like other pythons, but can detect cold-blooded prey by some sort of infra red imaging. They are thought to be completely immune to all other venoms and may well be a separate species altogether. Someone bitten by a Black-headed Python caught in the Pilbara region tested positive for Tiger Snake! These indeterminate specimens are referred to as cryptic species and we still don't know a lot about them. It is believed that there are still numerous species in Australia that are still to be found and many may well become extinct before they are discovered.

To maximise your chance of finding reptiles, you need to consider their daily activity period, the weather and the air pressure. If the air pressure falls, it could rain, rain brings increased insect activity and this in turn brings out predators. According to Chris one of the best places to find reptiles in the outback is along the roads. When it rains the rain runs off the roads and creates a green border that attracts the insects that in turn attract predators. In the outback the temperatures are extreme and after dark the road acts as a heat bank and this also attracts reptiles. While Chris is out there to trap live animals, up to 7 million reptiles are killed on the road each year, so the roadway is also a good place to find dead animals and a lot can be learned from them too. Road kill also attracts monitor lizards and the like, looking for food.

Chris showed many interesting slides of snakes, geckoes, lizards, goannas and frogs that he has caught on various field trips. So remember, if you are travelling in the outback watch out along the roads and you may be surprised what you will find. It was inspiring to hear such an interesting young man who is so well informed and enthusiastic about his work. It is a pity there is not more research funding available to enable him to be out in the field full time.

Geraldine Harris

Correction: Thank you to the person who so humbly pointed out that I may have meant to use the word "provenance" (place of origin) rather than "providence" (foresight/ timely care) in my article on Jenny Collier's talk last month. Which just goes to show you can learn about more than just plants and animals in Field Naturalist Clubs!

Geraldine Harris

Portland Field Naturalists' Club Inc.

Spring Campout 2003

Venue - Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp

10th - 12th October 2003

Members of the Portland Field Naturalists' Club Inc. are delighted to invite fellow field naturalists affiliated with the VFNCA to attend the Spring Campout to be hosted by our club on Friday October 10th through to Sunday the 12th 2003.

Venue facilities and accommodation will be located at the Cape Bridgewater Holiday Camp overlooking magnificent Bridgewater Bay near Portland.

It is envisaged that a number of activities will be on offer including field trips to look at our wonderful spring wildflowers and terrestrial orchids, as well as trips to view the nearby seal colony at Cape Bridgewater, Mt. Richmond National Park, Cape Nelson State Park, Swan Lake - Discovery Bay Coastal Park, as well as the Australian Gannet colony at Point Danger and some of our wonderful scenery.

Activities

Saturday 11th October 2003

Full Day Orchid Tour:
Trip to Bridgewater Lakes, Mt. Richmond National Park and Swan Lake

Full Day Coastal Tour:
Trip to Cape Nelson and Point Danger Gannet Colony

Half Day Coastal Tour:
Trip to view Seal Colony - Cape Bridgewater

Half Day Coastal Tour B:
Trip to Bridgewater Lakes - Discovery Bay.

Sunday 12th October 2003

Half Day Coastal Tour:
White's Beach - Discovery Bay

Half Day Coastal Tour:
Seal Colony - Cape Bridgewater

Half Day Coastal Tour:
Freshwater Springs & Blowholes - Cape Bridgewater

Sunday Lunch - Mt. Richmond National Park Summit

To register for what promises to be a memorable campout please fill out the attached form. (This form will be available at the meeting, or from the Secretary.)

A finalised schedule of events will be sent to all clubs six weeks prior to the campout.

The Australian Naturalists Network

The first moves towards forming the Australian Naturalist Network began in 1987, when the Geelong Field Naturalists Club promoted the production of entrance signs for town entrances. At the Victorian Field Naturalists Cubs Association meeting in 1988 it was decided that it should be an Australian project, and funding of $500 was made available. Names of naturalist groups across Australia were gathered, and the groups were advised that a suggestion to call the umbrella group the Australian Naturalists Network had been received. The subscription was set at $7. It was decided that the logo of the Network should be the Echidna.
By February 1996, the network had a total of 75 groups.

The inaugual campout at Alice Springs. The first meeting of the Network was held in Alice Springs from July 21 to July 29, 2000. The program was preceded by a 3 day safari to the Western MacDonnells and followed by a 6 day safari to Harts Range and the Eastern MacDonnells. During this period much was learned about the natural history of Central Australia, and many friendships were made.

An impromtu meeting at Alice Springs to discuss the future of the netwrk decided that a get-together should be held during each even-numbered year. Compiling Network registers and attending Network get-togethers were never thought of at the VFNCA meeting in 1988 when the meeting decided - after about 5 minutes discussion - that a project whereby "roadsigns bearing a distinctive Australian natural history feature be erected at major entrances of Australian towns where naturalist groups meet" should proceed.

The second get-together at Launceston. The get-together was arranged in three segments, a 4 day tour of north-east Tasmania, the 8 day core program, and a 4-day tour of north-west Tasmania. The core program included outings to Cataract Gorge, Notley Ferns, Tamar Eastuary and wetlands, Narawntapu National park, Liffley Falls, Beauty Point, Seahorse World, Cradle Mountain, Dove Lake, Sphagnum Meadow and Mathinna Falls.

Coming get-togethers. The third get-together will be arranged by the Darling Range branch of the Western Australian Naturalists Club during spring 2004, and the fourth by the Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association in 2006.

[From the VFNCA Web site]

Observations

• A Barn Owl was seen recently at the eastern end of the Moolort Plain where I spotted the first one about four years ago. Rita Mills

• Debbie Worland was seen "practically skipping" down the road after having sighted two Swift Parrots at the Castlemaine Golf Links on the

morning of July 3.

- Cootamundra wattles *Acacia baileyana* are in flower. Ern Perkins
- Golden Wattles *Acacia pycnantha* are in flower. Richard Piesse
- Spreading Wattle *Acacia genistifolia* is flowering in the Maldon Bush. Enid Chapman
- Ken Dredge watched a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles hunting in tandem near the Frank Illidge Sanctuary not far from Warrnambool. One bird swooped down to pick up a half-grown koala and flew with it to a good height. Then s/he dropped it and the other bird dived down and picked it up "on the bounce". The pair then flew off with it.
- Richard Piesse counted 120 or more Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos flying over Reckleben St. going towards Kalimna, fifty or more were sighted near the Woodend Bypass by Chris Morris and George Broadway reported a flock at Eganstown.
- Water in the Loddon had reached Warburtons Bridge a few days before the June meeting, but it hadn't gone the three or four kilometres to Glenluce Springs. Richard Piesse.
- Ian Higgins reported sighting a Crescent Honeyeater at Campbells Creek.
- A large flock of Choughs has been gathering in the trees on way to Fryerstown. ZOe Thomas
- A variety of fungi were evident at Barkers Creek after the rain in June. Geraldine Harris
- More and more Scarlet Robins seem to be returning to the area. Rita Mills
- Two Wedgetailed Eagles were brought down by ravens in Austerberry's paddock in Blakeley Road about noon on 25/7. The first, which landed on the ground, appeared to have a raven in its talons. Its mate landed low down in a tree nearby. When the one on the ground tried to get into the air it no longer had its prey, and in the time I watched, the ravens were not willing to let it fly off. These were the first Wedgetails I have seen in this area for 3 or 4 years, and the first I have seen on the ground near here. Rita Mills.
- Nicholas Taylor was walking with his parents on the beach at Torquay when he saw a brown bird of prey with a Galah in its talons.
- Eastern Spinebill in garden at Barkers Creek. Tall Greenhood *Pterostylis longifolia* in bush behind Campbells Creek. Geraldine Harris
- A pair of large unidentified parrots with vivid orange back, dark (grey?) wings seen feeding on the front lawn. Possibly aviary escapes? Can anyone help? Athol Dorman
- The pair of Boobook Owls were in their tree at gardens at 5.30pm but had gone on return visit with a friend shortly afterwards, but a single owl flew across path in front of us a little while later. George Broadway

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING: 24/7/03

Wednesday afternoon Spring Walks will commence on the Wednesday after the September General Meeting. **Volunteers are required** to lead the

excursions. If you know of a nearby area that may be of interest, please volunteer to lead a walk - you don't have to be an expert!
It was decided that **Castlemaine Field Naturalist brochures** should not be photo-copied for general sale without permission. Brochures will be provided at wholesale price to approved outlets.
The Web site/ Is it a native CD sub-committee recommended that we defer implementation of our **own web site** until later in the year. In the meantime members are encouraged to use the Castlemaine Club's section of the VFNCA site at http://home.vicnet.net.au/~seana.
The **Is It a Native? CD** is continuing to sell at a steady rate. It was decided to write to various environmental publications to encourage them to publish reviews of the CD.
Wanted – community members who would like to be part of the **Park Management Advisory Group** for the **Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park** to assist in the development of management plans for the park. For more information see Midland Express 15/7/03 or contact Annie Leschen, Parks Victoria Information Centre on 13 1963.

There is to be a camp at Perisher Valley in one of the Lodges for the **Victorian Nature Photography Group** from 10 - 24 January next year. Details are yet to come, but usually people stay one or two weeks, usually one. **If you are interested contact Rita Mills** on 5472 4553 - I should have details and the formal **invitation** by the end of August.
The camps are self catered, and very reasonably priced, and not all who go are photographer/naturalists. Some are naturalist/photographers (there is a difference!) and some are just naturalists.

Tom Garnett's book, *Bits and Pieces, Volume 1; Birds*, is now published. This is a collection of articles that he wrote for the *Age* on birds. Penny will have some copies at the August Meeting if you would like one.

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.
Reminder - Articles, reports and observations for the CN can be left with Noellene at Tonks Bros., Barker St, if that is more convenient for you.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club,
PO Box 324,
Castlemaine,
Incorporation #A0003010B

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, August, 2003.

Programme

General meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

Excursions are usually on the Saturday following the general meeting, and leave promptly at the times stated from **The Octopus, opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street**. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions, There are **NO excursions on total fire ban days.**

Business meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend. **NOTE** August, September and October '03 business meetings will be held at the Eco House in Mostyn Street.

Visitors are welcome at club meetings and excursions.

Sat. Aug. 2 ***Swift Parrot Survey*** **Ken and Maureen Dredge will lead. Leave the Octopus at 8.30am . For details see P.1 CN301**

Fri. Aug. 8. *History of the Coliban Water Channels.* Geoff Russell. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Aug. 9. *Coliban Water Channel- the energy dissipater at Sedgewick.* Leader R. Piesse. Leave the Octopus at 1.30pm sharp

Thurs. Aug. 28. *Broom Pull.* Meet at the Mary St./ Froomes Rd. corner at 9am Wear sturdy footwear, gloves, hat, etc. Bring drinks and morning tea.

Fri. Sep. 12. *Sri Lanka's Birds.* Stuart Dashper, Birds Australia. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Sept. 13 Roadside Cleanup. 8.30am. Wear sturdy footwear. Gloves, rubbish bags and red safety vests supplied.

Sat. Sep. 13. *Tubal Cain Mine and Sailors Gully.* Leader: R. Piesse, Leave the Octopus at 1.30 sharp.

Wed. Sept. 17 - ***The first of the weekly Spring Wildflower Walks,*** this one to be lead by Athol Doorman. Leave the Octopus at 4pm. Back in town by 5.30. The other walks will be on 24/9, 1/10, 8/10, and possibly, 15/10.

Fri. Oct. 10. *Platypus Conservancy.* Dr. Melody Serena. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Oct. 11. *Mandurang.* Leader, Max Stevens. Leave the Octopus at 1.30 pm .

Fri. Nov. 14. *Natural History, Outback.* Trevor Blake. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Nov. 15. *Bendigo Sewerage Ponds.* Leader: Chris Morris.

Fri. Dec. 12. *Members and Visitors Night.* 8.30 UCA hall.

2003 Committee - C. Morris (President) ph. 9885 4221, J.Turnbull (VP and Grievance Officer) ph. 5474 3035, G. Broadway (Secretary) ph. 5472 2513, H. van Gemert (Treasurer) ph. 5472 1082, E. Perkins, R Mills (Newsletter Ed & Public Officer), G. Harris, (Ass't Newsletter Editor), B. Maund, M. Oliver, R. Piesse and J. Cole.

Subscriptions for 2003 -

Ordinary membership: Single $22, Family $30

Pensioner or student: Single $19, Family $24

The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist.*